

Cambodian Civil Society Condemns Outrageous Murder of Political Analyst Kem Ley

Phnom Penh, 11 July 2016

We, the undersigned Cambodian civil society groups, are outraged at the brutal murder of independent political analyst and grassroots organiser Kem Ley yesterday morning, and call for a prompt, thorough and independent inquiry into his death.

Kem Ley, 46, was shot twice, in his chest and his head, in a heavily-frequented Caltex petrol station cafe in central Phnom Penh shortly before 9.00 on Sunday morning.

A suspect was arrested shortly after the shooting, about two kilometres away from the murder scene. Upon arrest, the man identified himself as “Chuob Samlab”, which translates in English as “Meet Kill”. He confessed to the murder, which he claimed was over an unpaid debt of \$3,000. Chuob Samlab – whose name police have said is probably an alias – will appear in court today.

A growing number of people gathered outside the petrol station where Kem Ley’s body remained after the shooting before thousands began a procession marching across the city to bring him to Wat Chas pagoda, on Chrouy Changvar peninsular, on Sunday afternoon. By the time they reached the pagoda, about seven kilometres away, the march had swelled to around 5,000 people, including monks and local communities.

“We are shocked and grieving at Kem Ley’s murder,” said Tep Vanny, Boeung Kak Lake community representative. “He stood up for human rights and justice and a better Cambodia, and now we in turn demand for justice for him, his family and all Cambodian people.”

The murder comes days after Kem Ley spoke on a radio talk show on popular broadcaster Radio Free Asia about a recent report from London-based international organisation Global Witness.

International organisations, numerous Phnom Penh-based embassies, and UN experts have condemned the murder. A statement released yesterday by Cambodia’s Ministry of Interior warned against national and international communities “delivering unconfirmed information which could potentially mislead the public”. Earlier today, Prime Minister Hun Sen also urged the public not to treat the murder as political.

Political tensions are rising in Cambodia ahead of commune elections in 2017 and national elections in 2018. It is imperative that the investigation surrounding Kem Ley’s murder be conducted with the utmost transparency if it is to be credible and diffuse misunderstandings, which would impact on the chances of upcoming elections to be free and fair.

“Cambodians must be free to participate in democracy without fear,” said Naly Pilorge, Deputy Director of Advocacy at LICADHO. “His assassination is a big loss for democracy in Cambodia and we demand swift action, beginning with a full independent investigation using international experts, to achieve justice.”

In 2014, Kem Ley founded grassroots group Khmer for Khmer, which aimed to increase democracy among political parties. A year later, the group began the Grassroots Democratic Party (GDP). Kem Ley had no part in the leadership of the new party, but he remained an outspoken political analyst and government critic. He leaves a wife, who is five months pregnant, and four children.

“Kem Ley was a vibrant leader who inspired thousands of community activists through his work,” said Sahmakum Teang Tnaut executive director Ee Sarom. “Everyone who knew him is shocked at his brutal murder, and will miss his independent and original ideas.”

“Kem Ley was a brave and outspoken critic of the government, and now his voice has been silenced. His murder might be an attempt to intimidate other critical voices, but Cambodian people will continue to express our opinion, exercise our freedoms and speak out,” said Moeun Tola, executive director of labour rights NGO CENTRAL.

Political analysts, wherever they fall on the political spectrum, must be able to carry out their peaceful and legitimate work without fear of violence and intimidation.

We reiterate our condemnation of this act, and demand a prompt, independent and thorough investigation, including a forensic examination by an independent and expert pathologist, so that Kem Ley and his family can receive justice.

This statement is endorsed by:

1. 92 Community
2. Alliance for Conflict Transformation (ACT)
3. Areng Valley Community (AC)
4. Banteay Srey Community
5. Banteay Srey Organization (BSO)
6. Beung Pram Land Community
7. Boeung Chhouk Community
8. Boeung Kak Community
9. Boeung Trabek Community
10. Borei Keila Community
11. Buddhism for Peace Organization (BPO)
12. Building and Wood Workers Trade Union (BWTUC)
13. Building Community Voice (BCV)
14. CamASEAN Youth
15. Cambodia Development People Life Association (CDPLA)
16. Cambodian Alliance of Trade Unions (CATU)
17. Cambodian Center for Human Rights (CCHR)

18. *Cambodian Center for Independent Media (CCIM)*
19. *Cambodian Domestic Workers Network (CDWN)*
20. *Cambodian Food and Service Workers' Federation (CFSWF)*
21. *Cambodian Human Rights Action Committee (CHRAC)*
22. *Cambodian Independent Civil-Servants Association (CICA)*
23. *Cambodian Independent Teachers Association (CITA)*
24. *Cambodian Indigenous Youth Association (CIYA)*
25. *Cambodian Informal Economic Workers Association (CIWA)*
26. *Cambodian Labour Confederation (CLC)*
27. *Cambodian League for the Promotion & Defense of Human Rights (LICADHO)*
28. *Cambodian NGO Committee on CEDAW (NGO-CEDAW)*
29. *Cambodian Tourism and Service Workers Federation (CTSWF)*
30. *Cambodian Youth Network (CYN)*
31. *Center for Alliance of Labor and Human Rights (CENTRAL)*
32. *Cheko Community*
33. *Chey Chomnas Community*
34. *Coalition of Cambodian Apparel Workers Domestic Unions (C.CAWDU)*
35. *Coalition for Integrity & Social Accountability (CISA)*
36. *Coalition of Cambodian farmer Community (CCFC)*
37. *Collective Union of Movement of Workers (CUMW)*
38. *Committee for Free and Fair Election in Cambodia (COMFREL)*
39. *Community Legal Education Center (CLEC)*
40. *Community Peace-Building Network (CPN)*
41. *Equitable Cambodia(EC)*
42. *Farmer Association for Peace and Development (FAPD)*
43. *Former Boeung Kak Women Network Community*
44. *Gender and Development for Cambodia (GADC)*
45. *Housing Rights Task Force (HRTF)*
46. *Independent Democracy of Informal Economy Association (IDEA)*
47. *Independent Monk Network for Social Justice (IMNSJ)*
48. *Indradevi Association (IDA)*
49. *Khmer Youth Association (KYA)*
50. *Land Community, I Village Preah Sihanouk Province*
51. *Land Community, Prek Chik Village, Koh Kong Province*
52. *Lor Peang community, Kampong Chhnang Province*
53. *Mother Nature (MN)*
54. *Peace Bridges Organization (PBO)*
55. *Phnom Bat Community*
56. *Phum 23 Community*
57. *Ponlok Khmer*
58. *Prek Takung Community*
59. *Prek Tanou Community*
60. *Prey Lang Community*
61. *Railway Community*
62. *Samaki 4 Community*
63. *Sahmakum Teang Tnaut (STT)*

64. *SOS International Airport Community*
65. *Strey Khmer*
66. *Thmor Kol Community (TK)*
67. *Toul Sangke B Community*
68. *Trapaing Anhchanh Thmey Community*
69. *Tumnop II Community*
70. *Wat Than Monk Network*